



The Effects of Sustained Cognitive Dissonance and Perceived Inequity on Employees

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Abstract

This paper examines the effects of prolonged states of cognitive dissonance and perceptions of workplace inequity on the employee. Anecdotal feedback was collected from employees within an affluent Connecticut school district where there are two main classes of employees – certified and non-certified. The classes are further differentiated by substantial differences in pay structures, in union representation, and in subsequent collective bargaining agreements.

Keywords: Cognitive Dissonance, Perceived Inequity

Synopsis of Existing Research

According to Fugate and Kinicki (2012), “Defined generally, equity theory is a model of motivation that explains how people strive for fairness and justice in social exchanges or give-and-take relationships.” A person is motivated by the balance between their behavior and the perception of fairness, and will seek to maintain a comfortable equilibrium between personal behavior and fairness. In an organizational setting, sustained dissonance and perceived inequity can result in avoidance behaviors. Employees appear to become demotivated and refuse to complete job tasks. Paradoxically, avoidance behaviors that present as demotivation, proves the existence of motivation. The natural inclination to restore equilibrium becomes the motivational driver.

Key Findings

- Employees remained conscientious about their work despite expressing a perception of sustained inequity.
- Non-certified employees reported more feelings of dissonance than certified employees.
- Both classes of employees identified organizational culture as the single largest driver of sustained inequity.

Suggestions for Future Research

Future research should:

- Include correlation/regression analysis.
- Establish baselines for dissonance and equity.
- Expand study to include at least two comparable school districts.

References

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